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*Casablanca*: Gender Roles and Stereotypes

“Here’s looking at you kid.” “Of all the gin joints in all the towns in all the world, she walks into mine.” “I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship” (Redwine). Although the movie came out in 1942, *Casablanca* has become one of the most famous and cherished classic movies of all time. The movie stars Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman, and is set in Africa during the beginnings of World War II (IMDb). Although the movie is now considered timeless, there are many instances of gender stereotyping that are old-fashioned and out-dated. These stereotypes are found in a number of different characters, including Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart), Ilsa Lund (Ingrid Bergman), and Victor Laszlo (Paul Henreid) (IMDb). Instances of gender stereotyping can be found throughout the film, until the very end, where the main character Rick makes an unexpected decision to undermine his character’s conventional male traits.

In *Casablanca*, Humphrey Bogart’s character, Rick Blaine, is a classic “man’s man.” He smokes, drinks, and owns a bar. Rick is not gay, nor is he hardly ever seen outside the bar where he works. Children Now, an organization that identifies the effects of gender stereotyping in the media on children, states that “the majority of male characters in the media are heterosexual and more often associated with the public sphere of work, rather than the private sphere of the home” (Media Awareness Network). The character is also tough: In the beginning of the movie, Rick denies an official of the German National Bank entry into the casino (IMDb). This scene shows that Bogart’s character is not afraid or intimidated by other men with status or money. Rick is also the stereotypical “quiescent man” or “strong silent type.” This male role is a leader who contains most personal feelings and always gets the girl (Media Awareness Network). Rick rarely shows any emotion, and chooses to remain calm, cool, and collected, even in times of great sentiment and drama. Rick always seems relaxed and unruffled, firing witty responses to adversaries and companions alike. One of his most remembered lines is, “I stick my neck out for nobody” (Casablanca). However, despite his tough appearance, Bogart’s character gives hints throughout the movie that he is good at heart. He objects to Ugarte’s business of selling visas to refugees, and also dislikes the Germans in World War II. Even though he does not deeply care for her, he safely escorts a drunk yet beautiful Yvonne to her cab one evening. Also, when another bar owner proposes a purchase of Rick’s African American friend and employed piano player, Sam, Rick refuses and instead asks Sam’s opinion in the matter. Rick’s persona of being tough on the outside but caring on the inside makes him a perfect example of a stereotypical “bad boy,” which is one of the reasons Ingrid Bergman’s character is drawn to him.

Bergman’s character, Ilsa also maintains traits of several stereotypical images of women. Firstly, she is very beautiful and feminine in the way that many actresses of her time were. This stereotype of beautiful women is still just as common today as it was in the 1940’s. Even more significant is the fact that Ilsa’s beauty, like other actresses’, is unrealistic for most of the world’s population. The Media Awareness Network believes that “media images of female beauty are unattainable but for a very small number of women” (Media Awareness Network). Secondly, Ilsa might also be thought of as dependent. In the movie, her character must make a decision between Rick and her current love interest, Victor Laszlo. Never does Ilsa consider choosing herself. That is, she never makes a decision that does not involve at least one of the men in her life. Bergman’s character is also the “damsel in distress.” With impending war on the horizon, Ilsa must choose between Rick, the bad boy who is capable of caring for not only himself, but also her as well, or Victor Laszlo, who is dangerously involved in the war. If Victor were to die, Ilsa would not be taken care of, but if Victor survived the war, then the two would live happily ever after.

Victor Laszlo, played by Paul Henreid, is portrayed as the “good guy” or “prince charming.” He is not as concealed or tough as Rick, and is more dependable in the sense that his relationship with Ilsa is solid. This is opposed to Rick, where Ilsa and he had already been in a previous relationship before meeting again in Casablanca. However, Victor too can be thought of as the hero. In the movie, Henreid’s character is deeply involved in the war effort against the Germans, and is risking his life for the greater good of the world.

Towards the end of the movie, Rick makes a decision that goes against most of his character’s previous traits. As stated previously, Rick’s character has a tough exterior role, while still hinting at an inner good. In *Casablanca*’s final scene, Rick contradicts his earlier idea of “I stick my neck out for nobody.” Knowing that Ilsa will choose him if asked, Rick makes the decision of letting Ilsa leave with Victor Laszlo from Casablanca instead of with himself. Rick believes that because Ilsa goes with Laszlo, she will be safer and more watched over. This decision goes against the character’s usual male stereotypes of men being unemotional, quiescent, and selfish, while still maintaining Rick’s persona as the closeted good guy.

Overall, *Casablanca* remains true to the gender roles and stereotypes of the time period (Pontuso 79). Nowadays, these stereotypes have lessened somewhat, but the film still remains a classic. While Ilsa and Laszlo remain true to their characters’ gender roles of damsel in distress and hero, respectively, Rick contradicts his character’s previous role of tough guy in favor of protector. In conclusion, the film *Casablanca* retains many gender stereotypes while still providing enough of a change to keep the viewers’ interest and mold the film into its modern role as a timeless classic.